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2011

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Rocks and Rainbows

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Rocks and Rainbows

by

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2011

Dedication

To my grandmother Rosalie Moore, ne Martin, who gave me part of her (fantastic) genetic code, influenced my aesthetic interests and encouraged me to pursue my heart. An avid supporter of the arts, She was my biggest fan and a great cheerleader.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my faculty, particularly, Jeff Williams, Janet Kastner, Sarah Canright, and Melissa Miller, who although were not part of my committee, showed me great support and encouragement during my time at the University of Texas at Austin. An Additional thanks, to my committee Margo Sawyer, Jack Stoney, Bogdan Perzynski, and Troy Brauntuch for helping me through the trials and tribulations of the Studio Art graduate program. To my fellow graduate students that began the program with me in 2008, I have learned as much from you as anybody about my work and myself. Thank you.

Abstract

Rocks and Rainbows

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Jack Stoney

Covering the topics of my conceptual interests overlapping with the production of several bodies of work over the three years of my academic curriculum, this report addresses how my theoretical ideas and commitment to materials have shaped and informed my work. The work produced at my time in the Studio Arts Program at the University of Texas at Austin has indeed come full circle, with subjects and themes growing out of and eventually returning to some of the first work that I produced here. This work discussed is organized in a non-chronological order to expose similarities in approach over the course of time. Coming into the program I wanted to focus on developing the content in my work. Reshaping the way I thought and approached sculpture, I have adapted my previous investment in materials and incorporated my greater interests in the human condition as expressed through the cultural relics of society.

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Introduction

Dealing with themes of the human condition, the majority of my work involves altering found objects. I use objects that are familiar, which most people have a relationship to. Themes that continually reappear in my work are ideas of origins and endings, posterity and obscurity, the finite and the infinite, sex and death. It is with these subjects that I propose ideas of the universal and intimate what it means to be human, to ask the questions that cannot be answered.

Materiality

I am interested in materiality; for the seductive qualities of materials, the range of emotions they elicit, how they educate our behavior, and inform cultural norms. The first sculpture I began working on in the graduate program, *Distortion*, came into being through my desire to deny the discrete object. My previous work dealt heavily with deconstructing the domestic object. Wanting to break away from this I became interested in the polyvinyl chloride tile for its ubiquity in both the home and commercial uses. The tile is cut into triangles and faceted together, creating a form rises up out of the floor. Eventually the triangles converge with square tiles that shift back into a typical grid. In the resulting sculpture, there is a transformation where the form ceases to exist as a discrete object. The object becomes the architecture while simultaneously the architecture becomes the object. The black, flecked tile creates an inverted black hole of sorts, as if the cosmos were projecting out towards you. It is both finite, in being discrete and infinite, by referencing an expanse that is difficult for the human mind to comprehend.



Distortion, polyvinyl chloride tile, 22in x 240in x 180in, 2009

I am interested in the instability of meaning and how we are conditioned to read objects and images. Our understanding and interpretation of objects and images change over time through cultural and personal perspectives. This type of malleability lends itself to ambiguity.

Ambiguity

Using ambiguity in my work allows the object to become something other than a replication of the original. In this process of making objects that are purposely ambiguous allows the work to perform a double role: being one thing and simultaneously something else. Ambiguity is exaggerated in the works through various modes of abstraction: alteration of material (headstone made of wood doubles as a headboard); removing information (taking away text from posters to reference landscape); and distorting the resolution (three-dimensional pixilating a rock-like form changes the level of legibility). These formal strategies of modification bring up issues of clarity and legibility in the work.

Projection/Participation

The knowledge and/or understanding the viewer has with a particular object is significant in how the work is read. I use iconic objects selected for their familiarity, which is an important element of my work. Often, the completion of the work depends on the viewers' participation. In many of the works the viewer is asked to project ideas of themselves or another onto a work. As in the work *Double*, which is an unnamed headstone. A sign that has been stripped of indicating words, the viewer is free to imagine either their own names (or the name of another) onto the work. The work brings to mind relics and is a reminder of fleeting time. It is memento mori and the viewer is reminded through the projection of themselves that everything that exists will one day cease to be.

The viewer [whose role is mainly passive] is occasionally implicated in the work. In *Framing Device #1* and *Framing Device #2*, the freestanding frames that were fabricated in relation to my own body, highlight the viewer's body when they stand directly in front of the work. Unbeknownst to them, the viewer becomes part of the work once they activate it with their body. The expectation to "complete" the work allows for the work to elicit a range of emotion of the inanimate objects, such as empathy, disgust, and even glee. The ability to evoke emotion through the work becomes a point of access to enter the work for the viewer. Devices such as beauty and humor become important for their capability to seduce. The viewer, thus identifying their feeling about the work may question its source, leaving space to interpret the object in front of them.



Framing Device #1 and Framing Device #2, steel, dimensions variable, 2011

Context

Removal of objects from their original context, the place that they would typically be found, i.e. a headboard in a bedroom, is not only placing them in the gallery, but giving them a new framework, such as in the works of *Double* and *Frame*. The width of a full size bed, *Double* stands alone as both a personal monument and an object that may be a headboard. The floral motif is modified from a common headstone pattern. Devoid of specificity for whom it exists, it becomes décor, banal in its displacement. A placeholder for the impending future, it is an indicator of both the home and the cemetery, signifying life and death. The deconstructed box spring, *Frame*, exposes the materials from which it is made. The inner armature has been eliminated so the remaining structure creates a shallow wall-like barrier. Creating an outline, the form highlights the floor below and mimics an open grave plot. Both *Frame* and *Double*, have multiple roles as furniture, architecture, and sculpture. This exemplifies the kind of ambiguity that I strive for in my work.



Double and *Frame*, plywood, koa and maple veneer, 39in x 52in x 8in, 2009;
MDF, steel, and hard cotton felt, 17in x 52in x 74in, 2009

Although site is always specific, place can be more generalized and non-specific. I do not replicate a particular place, but rather the idea of that place.

Double and *Frame* each flip between two particular forms, each being associated with place, the bedroom and the cemetery. The two forms, which are closely related through function, easily generate an imagined place. In my newer work I started using disparate objects to add complexity to the read of the fabricated location.

Creating and displaying collections of recontextualized objects allows me to group unrelated forms to reference archetypes. Contingent upon the other objects around them assembling objects together helps to compose a narrative.

The three pieces, *Rainbow Roll*, *Rainbow Roll (black)* and *Beach*, create a fragmented landscape denoting a sunset paradise. Each individual work has its own conceptual criteria and ideas, such as the work *Rainbow Roll*. The large three-color gradient is collaged using the iconic background imagery of rock and roll promotional posters from the 1960s. The image brings to mind famous rock and roll acts such as the Rolling Stones and Janis Joplin, lending to a presence that is both iconic and legendary. The poster spontaneously became branded through the subcultures of both printmaking and rock and roll. Without the viewer's recognition of the poster's reference or intent, it mimics mathematical color gradients and at the same time, through its size and abstraction, large modernist paintings.



Rainbow Roll and *Beach*, single ply cardboard collage on aluminum, 84in x 52in x 12in, 2010; crushed limestone, epoxy resin and cotton towel, 8in x 35in x 72in, 2010

Grouping the work opens up additional levels of meaning for the individual works. Without the context of being placed near other work, *Beach* and *Rainbow Roll* would be less referential to a sunset and unlikely, paradise. *Beach* is comprised of two components, a lime green cotton towel that is the same hue and vibrancy as the green in *Rainbow Roll*, and a cast rock. Based on an actual headstone, the word “BE” was carved into a stone at a monument shop. The rock was then crushed and cast back into the original form with an epoxy resin. The

resulting form is placed on the towel with the rock referencing the figure (the head), and the towel the territory of a grave plot in addition to the beach. Like an inspirational garden stone, the word is commanding; it tells the viewer they should “be,” as the rock, even though the rock no longer exists in its original form. The external narrative of the form reveals the condition of the object itself. All of these pieces together comprise a sunset paradise, like the personal monument series, making reference to ideas of the afterlife. The process of curating the objects that I select, create, and modify allows me to be both the author and the editor, commanding multiple roles as part of my process.



Beach (detail), crushed limestone, epoxy resin and cotton towel, 8in x 35in x 72in, 2010

Approach

As part of my working methodology, I apply both maximal and minimal efforts. Much of my work involves taking 2-dimensional forms and making them 3-dimensional. Both maximal and minimal endeavors have their place in my work and affect how the work is read. Maximal efforts are exploited in works like (Untitled) *Baltic Granite*, which was created using many single planes to make the finished object. In contrast, minimal energy is exerted in pieces like *Rainbow Roll (black)*. Using a poster background, the scanned image is digitally converted into grey scale with black added. Enlarged sixteen times from the original size, the large print is mounted on a single sheet of aluminum so it can be leaned against the wall. Through the simple gesture of leaning, the print becomes an object; an homage to its single-ply cardboard print predecessor.



Rainbow Roll (black), vinyl graphic on aluminum, 84in x 52in x 12in, 2010

In order for me to be prolific in my production, I need to periodically transition between the two scales of effort. Works with limited effort inform the intensely labored over ideas and vice versa. The speed and immediacy of work that takes little time to produce often has as much conceptual investment. The quicker work allows for a sense of lightness, less emotional attachment to an idea, which can lead to immediacy in its read. The potentially problematic instant interpretation on the part of the viewer can be offset by creating context through the objects in its proximity. (*Rainbow Roll* acts as a sunset next to *Beach* rather

than merely an enlarged collage) In contrast, work that is created over a longer period of time brings with it it's own interpretive issues to overcome. As in, *Untitled (Baltic Granite)* concerns arise of how the object is made, which conjures ideas of the "artist" rather than the conceptual premise for which is it based. Comprised of many surfaces, using common Formica laminate in a faux granite print, this piece is connected to the bodies of work made before it. Similar to *Distortion, Untitled, (Baltic Granite)* is broken down into triangles, the piece is a three-dimensional pixilation of a boulder-like structure. Like the *Rainbow Roll* posters, it references the digital and mathematical geometry, even though the nuances and imperfections clearly highlight the hand in the work. The Formica material is artifice, a synthetic man-made material that imitates the real, organized into a form that would be the source of the natural material it copies. In contrast most rock(s), especially hard rock like granite or marble, has material properties associated with longevity. For my personal monument series I also utilized Formica laminate to reference stone. Imitating the material used to carve monuments (used for it's ability to endure time) will actually take longer to break down than most stone, but both will ultimately degrade. Due the time it took to produce the piece, *Untitled (Baltic Granite)* emanates the aura of the handcrafted "art object", conjuring mysterious ideas of the artist. Inadequacies of interpreting the work through the condition of it's labor can become the main focal point, closing off ideas of it's conceptual content. In order to moderate this scenario I began to arrange a series of objects to open possibilities of interpretation.

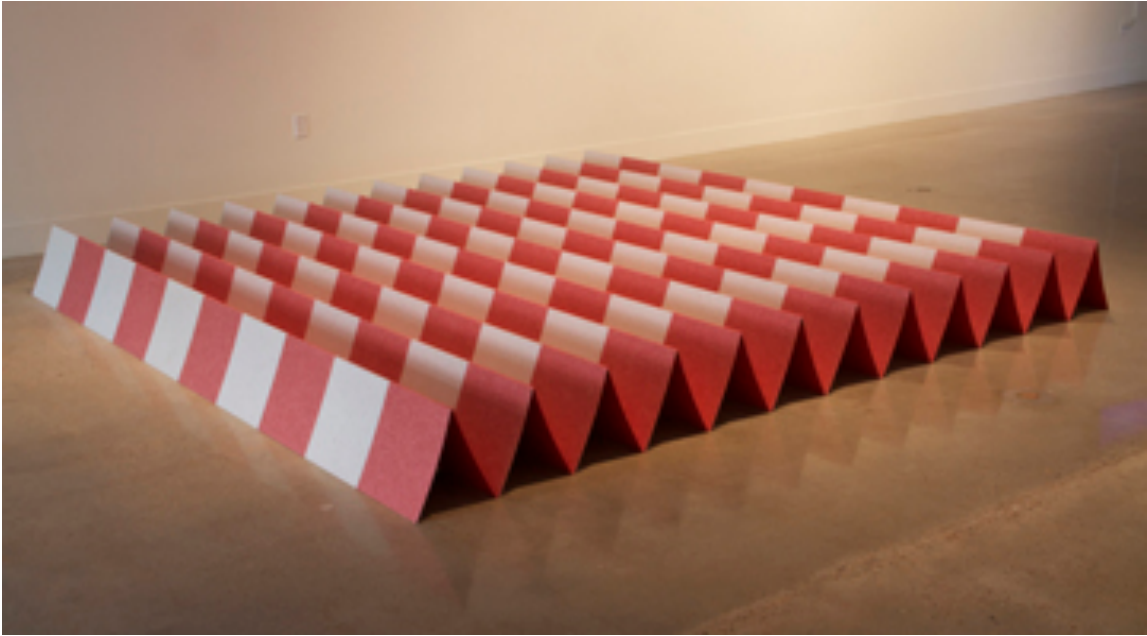


Untitled (Baltic Granite), Formica laminate, polyextruded styrene, and foam urethane, 54in x 55in x 55in, 2010

Place

Using source materials that originated in the United States, such as Formica laminate, also informs the works reference to place. Formica, a common counter-top surface, was invented in the U.S. at the beginning of the last century. It reached a height of popularity in mid-Century home décor, as did the above-mentioned ubiquitous rock and roll poster backgrounds. Utilizing these types of materials allow me to further create narrative about place and informs my lexicon of images.

The piece, *Check*, is made of polyvinyl chloride tile similar to the work *Distortion*. *Check* is made of square tiles leaned against each other to make pyramid/triangle forms. In the piece *Distortion*, the triangle planes eventually return to the square grid whereas in *Check*, the triangles are what create the square grid. Read from different perspectives, multiple patterns are visible. Created using pink and red tiles on one side and pink and white on the other, each pattern is doubled on the opposite side. From the floor some of the designs include stripes, checkered, and zigzag. When viewed from an aerial perspective, the accordion-like form creates a gingham check print. This pattern, which is most often presented in fabrics such as picnic blankets and tablecloths, became highly popular in the 1960s. *Check* plays with scale and resolution. Folded up like a paper napkin the work brings into question human scale; resolution flips back and forth from the material to the pattern. What is seen and what is interpreted leaves room for the unseen and the unnoticed.

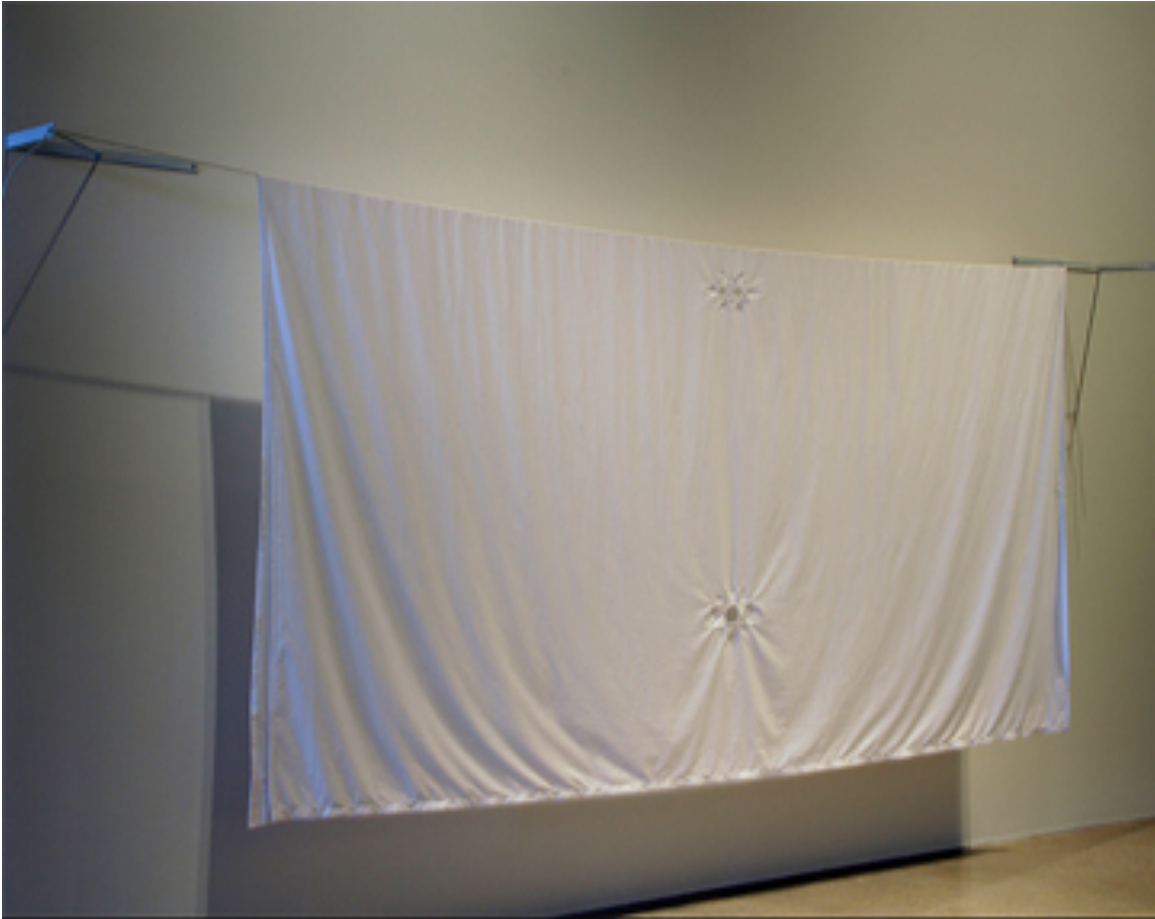


Check, polyvinyl chloride tile, MDF and tape, 11in x 120in x 120in, 2011

Absence/Presence

A practice to which I continually return to is removing information in signs. The work *Framing Device #1* and *Framing Device #2* are free standing pedestal signs similar to those found in restaurants and museums, usually with directive information. The works are fabricated to be empty stands, which frame whatever is behind them. Because of their ubiquitous nature, the viewer's familiarity with the object makes it go unobserved. It is activated when the viewer is close enough to be implicated (i.e. framed by the work).

The works *Framing Device #1* and *Framing Device #2*, fabricated based on proportions of my body, were the first pieces to reference my body specifically. The height of each centers my breasts and my crotch respectively. Similarly, *Holy Fuck* is made of a white linen sheet with cutouts for the eyes and genitals, the relationship between the two is determined by my own eyes and genitals. Embroidered with an American quilt pattern, the sheet is hung across a clothesline, is both a contemporized ghost costume via the era of Charlie Brown, and a sex sheet. Allegedly, sex sheets are used in religious practices and have been linked to both Puritanism and Judaism. When combined into a costume, the sheet simultaneously suggests burkas. It is vulgar without being explicit. Here again, the body is absent but the figural work becomes symbolic and the form doubles in meaning. The viewer is asked to conceptualize the object, not its passive state in the gallery, but in its ideological use (on either my body or another).



Holy Fuck, Linen Sheet and cotton thread, 65in x 100in, 2011

Earth Angel is another example of work that is both devoid of the body but suggests presence. A life-size image of an impression of my body in the sand making “an angel”, is blown up and printed on a banner. The sign is stretched by rope at the four corners, suggesting classical ideas and ideals of proportions. Like *Holy Fuck* there is reference to religious themes. A new development in my work, using religious imagery, again brings up ideas about culture and the human condition. Anonymity of the “angel” image in *Earth Angel* speaks of the universal, not just my body, every body, everyone.



Earth Angel, vinyl banner, 12in x 66in x 66in, 2011

Conclusion

Through an interest in objects and materials I developed a body of work over the course of my graduate career that explored ideas about the human condition. My working methodology has expanded from deconstructing and reconfiguring the found object to curating and assembling those works to encompass a broader interpretation. It is through this process I find the relevance to continue my practice.